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Around the table: In search of a historio-pedagogical dimension of tastes from childhood

It is impossible not to notice that the issues connected with eating, feeding or cooking have become present not only in guidebooks that include, above all, cookbooks and cooking compendia, but that this subject has undergone a multi-leveled treatment and has become present in historical, pedagogical, biographical, sociological, and andragogical literature. One cannot omit here the projects of Olga Czerniawska (2011), who has shown eating as an educational situation, and presented references to eating in the programs of adult education.

As Barbara Ogrodowska notices, “food — necessary for life and the biological existence of a human being — is also important in the cultural and customary sphere. All around the world, in every place and time, in all eras and social formations, the necessity of eating and acquiring food has mobilized human activity to a constant search for and improvement of tools and technologies necessary for the acquisition, preparation, and storage of food [...]. Food, and the essential to living function of eating, has always had great customary and social importance. It has performed an important function in human relationships, in cooperation and living together; and was a significant element of family life, home, neighborhood, and social celebrations” (Ogrodowska, 2010, p. 6).

The growth of interest in culinary traditions, noted in the recent years, bears fruit in the shape of many interesting initiatives intended to identify and promote regional, local, traditional products, foods, and dishes (2010, 348). Worth mentioning here are numerous projects, described in *Atlas złotego wieku* [*The Atlas of a Golden Age*], where the communal cooking of forgotten meals, the baking of bread, making butter and sour cabbage have become a bridge of understanding between seniors and the younger generations, a certain “drawing pin of generations” (Tokarz, 2003, p. 27).

Here, one should also mention an annual national contest, organized since the year 2000, "our culinary heritage," organized with the support of the Cooperative Fund — Agrolina (Ogrodowska, 2010, p. 348). When it comes to foreign initiative, one should mention the Schweisfurth Foundation, which — since its founding in 1985 — supports all research and educational initiatives devoted to all changes in the culture of eating (Gottwald & Kolmer, 2009, p. 7). Lothar Kolmer stresses that in the situation where the so-called MacDonaldisation of society resulted in eating becoming an act of secondary importance in life, the Schweisfurth Foundation aims to reinstate the idea of „eating with body and soul." In its publications, it points to eating and drinking as precious sources of human life, particularly so, as they constitute an inseparable element of Earth's biological and social sphere (p. 8). In 2001, the Foundation initiated a series of lectures devoted to the rituals of eating, which was intended primarily to point to its material, universal dependence. Apart from that, the cultural, ethnological, and historical perspective on the problem would also serve to additionally highlight the role that this sphere of life plays in the process of continuous development across the world (p. 9).

Eating is also a very rich subject that can certainly be used in teaching adults or in the biographical workshops that Olga Czerniawska wrote so much about. Another important fact connected to the subject is that the French Society for Autobiography and Autobiographical Heritage (APA) as the leading theme of 2007 chose eating and autobiography. A thematic conference was organized, where eating and drinking was discussed in many contexts, including memories of childhood experience (<http://sitapa.free.fr/buts,%20hist,%20fonct/journees07.htm>).¹

My inspiration for the reflections to follow has been, above all, the discovery in biographical materials of numerous references to sensual memories from childhood, in particular ones connected with food, its taste and smell (understood both literally and metaphorically). As it turns out, those memories are extremely vivid, have become deeply engraved in memory, where they constitute „the memory of the heart" (Czerniawska, 1997, pp. 9–13).

What about the place that this subject occupies in pedagogy? As Bogusław Śliwerski (2006, p. VII) notes, the study of pedagogy has become a special kind of value in Poland, due to numerous reasons. In the context of the undertaken reflections, one of his arguments becomes of particular importance, namely the fact that it is pedagogy that provides an opportunity to return to one's own childhood and to the moment of entrance into adulthood, to better understand what one participated in, in a more or less conscious manner, that which has become engraved onto one's own psyche and body and the

¹ The invitation was found on this website. Accessed 28.08.2007.

life of the immediate environment. It is the return to childhood that I would like to turn attention to, delight myself and others, as well as demonstrate how educationally inspiring such a trip back in time may be.

In the following reflections, by the use of published biographical excerpts of people well known and not so well known, I would like to demonstrate how important the taste experiences from the period of childhood are in autobiographical memoirs, be they bitter, salty, sour or sweet. Tastes from the period of childhood become to us not only sensory experiences, and a kind of myth, but also play the role of a time and place machine. I intend to attempt to discover the taste of childhood in the literal, sensual, and metaphorical sense, as well as to convince my readers to undertake their own personal search in this respect.

Stukenberg remarks that “biographical experiences leave their traces and their mark” (2002, p. 43). When reading autobiographies, one cannot help but agree. One can also add that they have their taste.

Which tastes from childhood do we remember best and why? How do we describe our first and most important taste sensations? Finally, what pedagogical contexts can be seen in those recollections?

Around the table

When one speaks of food, it is impossible not to mention the role and the importance of a table, which, despite the flow of time and the changes in lifestyle, is still regarded as the most important piece of furniture in the house, a place of relaxation, with the accompanying exchange of pleasant thoughts, mutual trust, and the strengthening of human relationships [...]. The traditional “let’s sit at the table” has its magical power. We return to it at various stages, wherever we are. “We sit at the table” and are together again, stare into one another’s eyes, feel safe. We are not alone” (Nasierowska, 2011, p. 13).

From a social and pedagogical perspective, the table is a special place, where not only meals are prepared or consumed together, but it is also a place of conversation and discussions, of current topics, but also an opportunity for memories and recollections. As Bożena Mann remarks, “common feasting at the table marks most wonderful moments and the most pleasing way of spending time” (Mann, 2010, p. 6). After all, “the home table, everyday, but especially during holidays, not only feeds us, but has ‘always’ created special human relationships. It gives us an unchanging sense of closeness, safety, and community. It becomes a symbol of home and the ties that bind us.

It provides experiences and sensations that we hold precious in our memory for all of our lives, memories that enable a tie and connection between generations, and thus, a continuity of our tradition (Ogrodowska, 2010, p. 347).

Below are several autobiographical memories from childhood, which certainly had a tremendous influence on the perception of the role and meaning of this special furniture in adulthood. It seems worthy to recall here the words of Emilia Krakowska (a Polish actress) who recalls the following: "The most important piece of furniture at home is the table [...] the table connects people and unites generations. Without a table there is no home. The table obliges. It invites eating together. [...] When I was a young lass growing up, I thought completely differently. 'A table? Why would I need that? It cramps the space. It's bourgeois trash.' In the house where I was born, there stood a great, solid, wooden table. Once, together with my brother, in an act of rebellion, we took down the table cloth and in its place we laid out old newspapers. On them, we placed a jar with pickled cucumbers and wine in a brown paper bag. We stretched out comfortably on our chairs, put our feet up on the table, and decided that this is how it was going to stay. Upon seeing us, mom just smiled indulgently. Half an hour passed. We gave in. It turned out that this was not what we meant. We crushed our own rebellion. Repentant, we took down our feet from the table, removed the newspapers, and laid out the table cloth. The matter of the table returned during my university years. I flew out of the house. When I got settled in the student dormitory, I threw out the table from my room. I didn't need it. In its place, I put a big mirror and a screen, to separate myself from my roommates. This was my place for contemplation because I felt like a great artist then. Some time passes. I grew up. Children appeared in my life. I created my own home. And there, the table became the most important piece of furniture. Today, I cannot imagine a real home without it" (Pałucha, 2009, p. 82).

Lucy Maud Montgomery, on the other hand, speaks concisely and to the point on the role and the significance of a table in her life: "To be honest, I love a richly laid out table. I take care of this piece of furniture and gladly sit by it" (E. Crawford & K. Crawford, 2007, p. 13).²

We can see, therefore, that the table is not only an important piece of furniture, but also a symbol of homely warmth and safety, as well as the symbol of both ordinary and extraordinary tastes and sensations which are savored with particular piety in our memory. This is suggestively exemplified by the memoirs of Zuzana Šliwa, Agnieszka Maciąg, and Murielle Rousseau. Zuzanna Šliwa: "We keep on fidgeting, peering anxiously towards the kitchen. Somebody swallows nervously. How much longer?! To invite guests — and then torment them in such a way?! Hurry up, over there! Can't you see the

² All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

suffering of the *pierogi*-starved guests? At last! A big, filled to the brim bowl lands on the table. The vulture forks fly up and spiral down — drowning in the soft, steamy crescents. What an aroma! What a taste! The string of memory vibrates, touched [...]" (Śliwa, 2008, p. 13).

As Lothar Kolmer stresses "*the communal consumption of meals* creates a bond between people. Preparing dishes together [...] dividing and handing out, then conversations at the table engage everyone. Already with the basket of bread being passed around a closed circle is formed. At that moment, everybody at the table seems equal" (Gottwald & Kolmer, 2009, p. 11).

These words are very important, as they show the value of consuming a meal from a social and pedagogical perspective. They also highlight the importance of community and communal bonding, indicating the role and importance of this atmosphere to family life. It is precisely the rituals of preparing and consuming meals together that many memoirs and biographical reports retell.

Agnieszka Maciąg (a well-known Polish model, the author of the book *Smak życia, czyli uroda zaczyna się w kuchni* [*Tastes of Life: or Beauty Begins in the Kitchen*]) recalls her first memory connected with food in the following way: "I did not have much life experience, but I knew that the one who cooks has the power [...] yet already then, I interpreted cooking, feeding the family as an expression of love and care. I wanted to be a good caretaker of my micro-world. I remember the moments spent in the kitchen with my grandma, Ania. She kneaded the dough for pasta with swift movements. How was it possible that out of this powder and water, there emerged a springy, compact ball with a strange smell? Then, rolled it as flat as paper, cut it into stripes, it landed in chicken broth, and became — on my plate adorned with small flowers — pasta insistently falling out of my spoon. Pure magic" (Maciąg, 2007, p. 9).³

And the words of Murielle Rousseau (a French writer, the author of *Á Table! Die wunderbaren Rezepte meiner französischen Familie* [*Á Table — Excellent Recipes of My French Family*]): "In our childhood, while helping in the kitchen, we best loved to listen to the stories told by our father and 'Mamma', that they imparted on us while cooking. These were family stories, memories from past celebrations and old times when our family did not yet live in Paris [...]. In this way, the long dead ancestors came to life before our eyes, amidst the steaming broths and finely cut vegetables. Because their professions and paths of life were very engrossing, every time we demanded tales of them, like a favorite goodnight story, or a tasty bon-bon [...]. I will never forget that wonderful smell created when my father dropped garlic onto the

³ Agnieszka Maciąg is describing here her memories of how to make a traditional Polish soup — *rosół*, that is, meat broth. The most popular is clear chicken broth, however, it can also be made of three meats: beef or veal, white and dark poultry, and vegetables such as parsley, celery, leek, and carrot.

pan where the fresh boleti were simmering. Boleti which we picked during the day in our secret place in the forest" (Rousseau-Grieshaber, 2008, p. 12).⁴

The description of these memories is extremely suggestive, and with the eyes of our soul we can easily see the ritual of preparing pasta, or smell the mushroom dish, whose mystery of taste seems irrevocably connected with the fact that they were picked in a secret spot in the forest. More important than the preparation and consumption of the described meals seem the stories, conversations, and memories which comprise the atmosphere that accompanies these actions. It is this special and unique atmosphere that seems to constitute the essence of the tastes of childhood remembered by the mentioned authors.

This is also apparent in the memoirs of the already mentioned Zuzanna Śliwa (the author of an autobiographical cookbook: *Pogaduchy przy misce pierogów* [Talks by the Bowl of Pierogi]), who also remarks on the unique atmosphere of her family home during communal cooking: "In my memory, *pierogi* are always connected with happy talks. They constitute a compact unity, with the filling of wonderful tastes. Frequently, around the biscuit board the whole family gathered" (Śliwa, 2008, p. 14).

We can see that the *atmosphere of the family home* is irrevocably connected with the preparation and consumption of meals. In this context, the memoirs of Aniela Rubinstein (the author of *Kuchnia Neli* [Nel's Kitchen], and a wife of Artur Rubinstein) seem very significant: "I frequently wondered where my passion for cooking came from. Today, I can see that it grew out of the atmosphere of my family home. Ever since I can remember, in our family a meal was something more than a mere satiation of hunger: it was always a unique ritual" (Rubinstein, 2002, p. 12).

Thus, what happened and happens "on the table" and "at the table" is a certain kind of an image that mirrors human relationships. The table is a chromatic tradition, it holds many customs and habits, but also an image of "daily bread," and thus, the table provides an insight into everyday life. It is the heritage of ancestors, but also a passion of generations, passed on with the utmost care to the following generations.

Eating as heritage and a treasury of generations

Food and eating has always had great customary and social importance. They performed an important function in human relationships, in cooperating and

⁴ All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

living together; they were a significant element of family life, home, neighborhood, and social celebrations (Ogrodowska, 2010, p. 6). Furthermore, the knowledge, skills, experience, and various technologies for the production, gathering, and processing food, products and dishes, their type, quality and way of consumption, as well as the customs and the culture of the table passed on from generation to generation are evidence of civilizational development, the level of life, and social status. They are the signs of regional and national uniqueness. They are, as Ogrodowska stresses, our heritage, as much as material monuments such as landscape, language, custom, and rituals (2010, p. 6).

Certainly nobody needs convincing that "in all the great civilizations on our Mother Earth, there exists a close relationship between eating and family and tradition, pleasure, responsibility, which, as Mario Batali writes, sharpens appetite and awakens the noble passion of searching for one's roots, discovering one's heritage, including culinary traditions, and we eagerly research the history of our families" (Paltrow, 2012, p. 10).⁵

In a book of memoirs, but also filled with culinary motifs, *Aunt Maud's Recipe Book*, we read: "When I happened to visit Doctor Stuart Macdonald in the final years of his life, he frequently recalled a cake that his mother, Lucy Maud Montgomery, baked. She called it mock cherry pie [...] Doctor Stuart never forgot that mock cherry pie, though the recipe was lost after his mother's death in 1942. I wondered at the frequency that this memory haunted Stuart Macdonald. It indicated that meals were a very important part of family life. The mother supplies food to provide support for her child, but she also offers food for another reason — to show love. The recipe came from Prince Edward Island, like Stuart's mother. This ordinary cake created a bridge between her past, her son, his friend and herself. She could delight in its taste, but also derive pleasure from sharing it with others" (E. Crawford, K. Crawford, 2007, p. 5). Therefore, as we can see Montgomery "very well understood how much pleasure good food can give, and what an important role it plays in human relationships and the building of one's identity. She was right — her son remembered that pie till the end of his days, and associated it with his mother" (2007, p. 5).

As we can further read in those texts, "Maud's grandparents were already dead, when the writer's memories led her to their corner in the old orchard. The recipes which she noted preserved a living, tangible image of aunt Annie, like Maud's culinary notebook allows us to become familiar with a piece of her existence. We can preserve and recreate the recipes for dishes which gave Maud so much joy, allowed her to enrich the lives of others, give them a lot of pleasure. Could we expect a fuller and more beautiful heritage?" (2007, p. 157).

⁵ All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

In a very convincing manner, these words demonstrate the importance of the culinary tradition passed from generation to generation, which is not only the change to preserve the treasury of generations, but also wonderful food for the soul, and provide a foundation for our identity. In the context of this insight, the following words seem suggestive: "We are to keep memories of how we helped our mothers to prepare some extraordinary dish. This common experience should be regarded as something more than a preparation for future life. Thanks to it, we gained an inner sense of belonging to a small, select group, usually a family" (2007, p. 155).

Here, a reflection comes to mind, that finding out the customs connected with eating, feeding, we touch history in a special manner. It is also a valuable pretext for a broader glance at everyday life, a lesson on the building of one's identity, a lesson in culture and tradition, and/or finally, an opportunity for self-reflection. Below are several fragments of narrations, which appear particularly pertinent here. Bożena Mann states: "In such families as mine, there remains a nostalgia for old tastes. Every family cherishes its own traditions and reaches for everyday or holiday recipes of their ancestors. [...] The dishes which we had eaten in our family home were always unforgettable and the best, not only in terms of taste, but also for sentimental reasons. [...]" (Mann, 2010, p. 6). And a memory of Zofia Nasierowska: "Our family kitchen was guarded by our grandmothers, mothers, and aunts, passing the family secrets of good recipes from generation to generation." And the words of Irena Stasiewicz-Jasiukowa: "the *uszka*⁶ served with borsch, filled with sliced mushrooms and onion, fried in oil until crunchy, were simply wonderful. The recipe containing the ingredients and preparation was passed by my grandma to my mom, and my mom passed it to me" (Stasiewicz-Jasiukowa, 2001, p. 10).

Thus the memories connected with tastes, preparing and eating food constitute a special kind of culinary heritage, which most certainly is "an important cultural tradition, reinforced by our constant need of feeding" (E. Crawford, K. Crawford, 2007, p. 5). Furthermore, while inspecting biographical materials, one can frequently notice fragments connected with the fact that it is precisely thanks to the remembered tastes that we can recreate our memories of past moments, important events and places, but also the mundane everydayness from our childhoods. Thus, those memories certainly also play the role of a *time and place machine*. Below are several narrative fragments, meaningful in this respect. The memories of Zuzanna Śliwa: "*Pierogi* are in my genes. Already in my early childhood, I realized that they excel above all other dishes. And, although in later years I have tried many culinary wonders from around the globe, my love for *pierogi* survived all

⁶ *Uszka* are a Polish form of ravioli.

the trials of time. Sitting by a plate of Russian or cabbage-filled *pierogi*, I frequently catch myself thinking that I am still that little girl with ponytails, who, wriggling impatiently by the kitchen table, peers with longing towards the steaming dish on the cooking stove" (Śliwa, 2008, p. 14).

The words of Jerzy Stuhr (a famous Polish actor) also demonstrate the power of tastes and scents from childhood and the magical power of those memories, which move us across time and space: "She hated accounting all of her life, but thanks to my mom's profession, I knew the taste of *kabanosy*⁷ and the smell of citrus fruit, in those ragged times [...]. Before Christmas, the ladies from accounting received a case of delicacies each, to be sold among them. These were the most wonderful moments of my childhood. My mom's office turned into a gourmet store. Dates, figs, lemons. My sense of smell comes from those times. Today, when I stroll around marketplaces abroad and smell dates and oranges, I close my eyes and already see my mother's office and her, equally distributing all these morsels" (Stuhr, 2009, p. 190).

And a fragment of narration by Murielle Rousseau: "I remember as if it was only yesterday, when I was three years old, I was sitting on the floor at my grandma's house, I was podding the beans for a traditional Provencal dish [...]. I will never forget the taste of the wooden spoon for sampling, which my father always passed to me, or anecdotes told while preparing every dish, or the description of ingredients. When I recall all of it, I teleport myself to a world where I feel blissful and safe" (Rousseau-Grieshaber, 2008, p. 12–13).

In this way, the remembered taste and smell of food, frequently plays a role of a machine that enables one to move in space and time.

The sensuous taste of childhood

In the fragments presented above, apart from very evident references to heritage and tradition, and references to the atmosphere of a family home and its connection with eating, one can also perceive the *sensuous taste of childhood*. The taste of sometimes simple and everyday dishes acquires a very special meaning and allows the writers cited above to return to their childhood, a time which is frequently described as social, magical, sacred. Here are several memories, that show the sensuous taste of childhood in a very powerful manner, and Carl Gustav Jung's very intense description: „I am sitting in our dining-room, on the west side of the house, perched in a high chair and spooning up warm milk with bits of broken bread in it. The milk has

⁷ *kabanos* — a dried or smoked, sometimes spicy sausage.

a pleasant taste and a characteristic smell. This was the first time I became aware of the smell of milk. It was the moment when, so to speak, I became conscious of smelling. This memory, too, goes far back" (Jung, 1963, p. 21). Eating stimulates sense, but is also a source of many emotions and feelings, which can also be found in biographical reports, even many years after the described experience. Here are several, and as the first one, Janina Bauman's (the author of an autobiographical book *Zima o poranku* [Winter at Dawn], the wife of Zygmunt Bauman), who recalls the times of war, and how food could, in extreme situations, provide a sense of comfort and euphoria: "Sometimes, late at night, I ventured for bread. [...] the return was not so scary anymore. The warm aroma of bread made me feel safer. I could rarely restrain myself from biting at the crunchy crust" (Bauman, 2009, p. 117). And "A loaf of fresh bread or a handful of rice won in some newly opened shop and triumphantly brought home by one of us — caused real euphoria" (2009, p. 45).

Wojciech Wiśniewski (the author of the autobiographical novel *Smak dzieciństwa* [The Taste of Childhood]) recollects in his memories of childhood the feeling of stupefaction connected with eating, or rather tasting: "The very sight of delicacies always stupefied me. I never knew whether to pick two almonds, a fig, a date, or carob or nuts that we called 'grandpas'. My mother purchased those delicacies in the colonial shop of Pakulski Brothers [...] Mother talked to the attendants, sampled [...]. Only after sampling would she decide what to buy. And I did not complain that my legs hurt. I waited nicely and patiently, because I knew I would be rewarded" (Wiśniewski, 2008, p. 23).

Childhood memories also refer to extremely negative feelings, sensations, and emotions, such as fear, revulsion or hunger. One could say metaphorically, or sometimes literary, that they were particularly bitter. Józef Musioł (a lawyer, writer, and social activist) recalls from childhood the taste of fear. "I carried reports — bravely, like a child can. Yet I will never forget the fear when I got stopped once, and in panic, I ate the report. I remember the stomachache to this day, and not from indigestion but fear" (Lubina-Cipińska, 2006, p. 90).

The bitter taste of childhood is also apparent in the memoirs of Joanna Chmielewska (an author of crime stories, thrillers, comedies, and books for children and young adults), Bodil Malmsten (an acknowledged Swedish writer), and Teresa Bogucka (a sociologist, writer, and a journalist).

A memory of Joanna Chmielewska: "I hated fruit soup. Boiled fruit with dumplings and cream made me wretch, and berry soup in particular." Bodil Malmsten: "We ate thick milk, soured with 'butter,' a very precious *chymozyna*, shared by the village ladies that came from butterwort, an inconspicuous, sticky plant with lilac flowers that grew on bogs. Lukewarm milk mixed with 'butter' was placed overnight in a root cellar. Juniper branches laid out on the hard earthen floor and the scent of wet earth endowed milk

with such a peculiar aroma, that even memory cannot improve it" (Malmsten, 2004, p. 67).⁸

And finally, the bitterness of Teresa Bogucka's memories: "The food was abject. Mainly grits. Pablum with a dash of jam. Corn polenta from UNRR packages — fodder, I think [...] some cakes, potatoes, thick soups, spinach, carrots [...]. I hate them, till this very day" (Olech, 2006).

Wanda Kocięcka (the author of *Oddajcie mi Świętego Mikołaja! Wspomnienia z dzieciństwa na Kresach Wschodnich w latach wojny* [*Give Me Back Santa Claus! The Memories from Childhood in the Eastern Borderlands during War*]) recalls the bitter taste of childhood during the times of war and occupation in the following way, a taste that childhood ingenuity managed to sweeten somewhat: "We were becoming poorer and poorer. Parents sold their things, exchanging them for food [...] we walked around hungry. We were rationed a piece of bread each, and coffee from burned acorns. I picked nasturtiums with great pleasure, sucking out the sweet nectar from the pointed ends of orange flowers. I love this plant till this day. We picked dock and nettle for soup, and during early spring we pierced the trunks of young birches, using metal pipes to gather their sweet, sticky juice into bottles. Saccharin was acquired from time to time, though it did not satisfy our demand for sugar. Even today, I do not feel shame at the thought of how me and my sister snuck into the henhouse, taking two eggs and then, in the barn, carefully broke the shells, and slowly, with delight, drank all of the contents" (Kocięcka, 2006, p. 73). This fragment also illustrates the dramatic situation of a child's hunger and the child's cunning and ingenuity in taming that situation. The memories of Emily Wu and Larry Engelmann: "Sister, I wanna go home. I am hungry. I was just about to say that too, but I restrained myself. I went into the room, squeezed out a little bit of toothpaste on my finger. I returned to Yicun with the words that I have a sweet for him — Close your eyes — I said. I rubbed the toothpaste into his tongue. He tasted it, he smacked his lips and asked: is it really a sweet? — Really — I replied — Xiaolan gave it to me. He smiled, licked his lips and asked for more" (Wu & Engelmann, 2008, p. 146).⁹ As we can see, food, certain tastes, and the feeling of satiation in autobiographical texts very frequently become the subjects of children's fantasies and delight. Below are several fragments which illustrate this issue.

Chagall's memory: "My father was falling asleep. I looked at him with envy, when he was given meat dishes in sauce, roasted in a special way. I greedily looked at the pot, the place where it was taken out of and put back, when mother filled his plate. Was there a tiny piece left, a bone, which I could also delight in? [...] I thought: perhaps time will come when I will become

⁸ All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

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a father, the master of the house, and will be able to enjoy such a roast to my heart's delight. The view of those Sabbath dishes carried me far away, reminding of the existence of some meaning of life" (Chagall, 2003, p. 39).

The reminiscence of Murielle Rousseau-Grieshaber: "As a small girl, together with my brother Jean-Luce, I pushed my nose to the window pane of the confectionary 'Grandin' in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. We lost the track of time, wondering at what we saw inside" (Rousseau-Grieshaber, 2008, p. 140).¹⁰

And finally, the words of Joanna Chmielewska: "There existed such a thing as a feast. In almost all fairy tales there appeared a feast, 'the Wishing-Table,' servants of the sultan setting the tables, the wedding feast at the king's court, feasts, feasts, everywhere feasts. I imagine such a feast, and in my opinion, it appeared this way: rye bread with butter spread very thickly, a great sausage and sweet cherry juice. Why that, I have no idea, but I guess these were the delicacies that I had rare access to as a child" (Chmielewska, 1993, p. 47).

Fantasies of food are very vividly expressed in the narrations of Emily Wu: "Every morning, my grandma got an egg — in those times a real morsel — because she was a diabetic and my dad told me it was for her health [...]. I watched her eat it and was drooling at the sight. One morning, when my parents went to work and left the two of us with our grandma, I fried her an egg, as usual. Instead of eating it, grandma called Yiding. She told him to sit by her, cut the egg to pieces and fed it to him in front of my eyes. When I leaned forward to see better, grandma all of a sudden stopped, looked at me sternly and said through her teeth: — Go to the other room. This is not for girls" (Wu & Engelmann, 2008, pp. 44–45). And another memory by the same author: "We got a pack of peanuts from my mother. Yiding took care of the distribution. She rationed us one peanut daily, until they ran out. I and Xiaolan constantly talked about food. We described in detail the dishes made by our mothers. We dreamt of a big feast. Once, I woke up in the middle of the night, because my stomach ached from hunger. Trying not to wake anybody, I opened a bag, put some toothpaste into my mouth and chewed it till it was completely dissolved" (2008, p. 145). The presented fragments and motifs connected with food as a subject of childhood dreams and desires are extremely rich, full of child's imagination and fantasies.

In childhood memories, much space is devoted to descriptions connected with the holiday taste of childhood. Let us then look at the fragments that touch upon that motif:

"At Christmas, my father, after many hours of pre-holiday night preparations, as a crowning of the feast, set upon the table [...] a traditional, rich roll-up, shaped like a log and decorated with chestnuts and chocolate. Christmas and roll-up — for me, one cannot exist without the other" (Chmielewska, 1993, p. 146).

¹⁰ All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

"The Sabbath supper — my father's clean hands, his face, and the white shirt — filled me with peace. Everything was good. A meal was served. Oh! My appetite! Stuffed fish, meat with carrot, pasta, calf jelly, chicken broth, juice, white bread. It was getting hot" (Chagall, 2003, p. 39).¹¹

"On our name-day, each one of us had the right to order our favorite dinner [...]. We usually chose the following: chicken broth with noodles, a calf cutlet, potato and spinach puree, but above all, our favorite pudding — a Spanish cake. The cake was made out of whipped egg white, like for a meringue, whipped cream and got chocolate sauce. We looked forward to this cake the whole year" (Świeżawski & Bikont, 2005, p. 21).

"And sweets appear at our home again. Father works at Wedel¹² now, and every month he brings home his sweet allowance, an addition to wages: sweets, candy, cookies. Opening such a package is a holiday. Everyone got their allotment" (Wiśniewski, 2008, p. 9).

"And then we bought sweets for money, and ate them: bon-bons and comfits, and then an ordinary day came" (Malmsten, 2004, p. 13). The presented examples are evidence of how much emotion is connected with food and thinking about it. Of particular importance here is the fact that these are memories of selected authors from the period of childhood, which existed in different social and cultural realities, and different cultures. This aspect aside, all these memories seem to be connected by one thing — the emotional intensity and suggestiveness of the respective author's description. This fact seems to be of great importance from a pedagogical perspective, as it makes us aware and teaches us the perception and memorizing of the surrounding reality by children — humans of a particular sensitivity. In these memories concerning everyday life in childhood, one cannot omit the *motifs connected with people irrevocably associated with memories of taste*. These memories are particularly tender and touching. And so Rousseau-Grieshaber retained the following memory of her culinary satiation, of her grandmother: "I can still smell the aroma of fresh strawberry jam, which 'mommy' — that's how we called our grandmother — made every year [...]. In front of my eyes, I even have the light foam that gathered on the surface of strawberries boiling in a copper pot" (Rousseau-Grieshaber, 2008, p. 12).

It is important to indicate, that the tastes described in this section are usually inaccessible in adulthood, they have passed away with the people who created them. This awareness is induced in a special manner by the words of Malmsten, who recalls her grandma and the food she made in the following way: "I liked everything, but my favorite was the calf dance, a true delicacy, unavailable today. It passed away together with Momma. [...] The

¹¹ All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

¹² *Wedel* — a well-known Polish confectionery company.

calf dance was Momma's mystery. She was the only one to know its secret, neither was there a recipe [...]. Momma measured out the ingredients by hand with unfailing precision. For a long time, meticulously she mixed beestings with normal milk with an addition of sugar, cardamom, and cinnamon cane, and then she poured it all to a tray smeared with butter and syrup. Then she put the tray into a water-filled pot and baked in the oven till the dance congealed like scrambled eggs, and a brown crust was formed on the surface. The calf dance was happiness land of its own, and it had no equal. I got a bit to taste on a small plate. To describe this sample Marcel Proust would need a hundred pages, and still he would not fully succeed" (2008, p. 76).

"I longed for a bowl of moose broth and cold cardamom dumplings. How empty is this longing! There is no Momma now, who could endow the broth with a unique aroma, and give a special taste and consistency to the dumplings" (2008, p. 78).

"We hungered for knowledge like for bread"

Educational references and inspirations

When showing the educational or pedagogical aspects of "eating" or "feeding," it is worthwhile to refer to the memoirs of self-taught men, edited by, among others, Joanna Landy-Tołwińska. Even the part of the very title is telling, *We Hungered for Knowledge Like for Bread* (Landy-Tołwińska et al., 1968). In the memoirs we can find many references to the subject, and we read about "spiritual food." One cannot thus help but note that the sense of "consumption" exceeds the mere physiological need for eating or drinking and relates to the social, educational or religious sphere" (Gottwald & Kolmer, 2009, p. 10).¹³

As has been demonstrated earlier, memories and tales concerning consuming meals and culinary traditions can become both a treasury of culinary knowledge and a source of information about everyday life in a given socio-historical reality. The preparation of meals by different generations together can become an excellent opportunity for learning, passing on traditions and customs, which have perhaps already been forgotten, but, which constitute our identity. It is also an excellent opportunity for meeting in the pedagogical sense. In the memories related to educational contexts of eating, I have also encountered a fragment which directly connects eating with education. These are the words of Wojciech Wiśniewski who recalls the following: "And so, thanks to Wedel chocolate, I learned how to read. It started with a piece of chocolate with

¹³ All the ensuing translations come from the translator.

the letter E, like Ewa, the name of my eldest sister. Then there was the very important letter W, the first letter of my name and surname. Then D, like *dom* (home) and L, like *Lulajże Jezuniu* [Go to sleep, little Jesus] — a carol that we sang with the piano accompaniment of my mother. ‘Wedel’ was the first word that I infallibly read on chocolate and sweets. Then I spelled out from the wrapping that chocolate is unique, milk, what it is made of, how much it weighs. It was the first text that I got to know by myself” (Wiśniewski, 2008, p. 10). And another memory by the same author: “I placed the pictures found in chocolate in an album, and this is how I got to know the Polish kings. There were also a series with national outfits, old cars, etc.” (2008, p. 24). Another fragment illustrates the memories concerned with the first stage of education and its taste. The memory of Małgorzata Kalicińska (a popular Polish writer) concerning the kindergarten years: “I don’t remember any children from my group. But I very well remember the way of eating soup [...]. For tea, we got sandwiches, all sorts. But certainly without meat! There were such delicacies as block marmalade on bread, brown, sweet and sour, cut into thick slices. Served with milk. Sometimes brawn, lard with bits of bacon and pickled cucumber, tea from a bucket, poured by Mrs. Bronia. However, what we liked best was bread with salted herring, or ... O! This was the best: bread with margarine and chopped onions with salt. Mom never made it at home!” (Kalicińska, 2009, p. 43).

The presented fragments of narrations and reflections seem to be extremely inspiring and suggest that at this moment, ideas and solutions of an educational character should be given, related to the tastes of childhood. Thus, I intend to mention my experiences connected with the subject, which is related to a study project, entitled “A Biographical Map of Life,” done by students for the andragogy subject. Several works constitute an excellent exemplification of how tastes can capture and retain the tenderest of memories. The author of one of the projects, using a metaphor, in her work “Pasta without Secrets” wrote: “My life is like pasta. It takes on all shapes, colors, it tastes differently every time. The spices, the sauces, the ingredients create pasta. People, situations, create my life.” In her work, the author presented her autobiography, the stages in her life, divulging the secrets of tastes of every stage, as every stage was matched by a pasta that best represented its character and atmosphere. Here are several fragments of that project: *Care-free childhood*: Among the Italian pasta dishes, there are many very simple ones, with very few ingredients. A very popular one, for instance, is pasta *ala’ burro*, or simply pasta with butter. Like my childhood — simple sunny, without worries. Totally uncomplicated [...]. My brother’s birth: spaghetti can be divided endlessly. Pasta, like love, can be divided practically without end. There is no portioning out, there is enough for everybody. The birth of my brother taught me how to share love, and my brother is like spaghetti — you never get bored with him and everybody likes him [...]. *First love*: unforget-

table aromas. For pasta to have real Italian character, it needs to be seasoned with fresh herbs. In our herb garden, we must have: basil, thyme, sage, rosemary, oregano, and parsley. Our first love is most of all unforgettable aromas, it is also immature and green, green like green tagiatelle with three cheeses! *The first passing of a loved one*: pasta must be al dente — it maintains firmness, slightly resists to the teeth, but it is not uncooked inside. There is nothing worse than overcooked pasta. The death of my great-grandmother was the first really sad event of my life. In my culinary adventures I can only compare it to overcooked pasta. The entering into adulthood: How does eighteen taste? [...] Bitter-sweet, I would say. We expect privileges, and we get them with responsibilities. I would choose a dish with spinach, because for me spinach can be equally delicious and uneatable [...]."

The presented reflections do not only concern the issues related to eating meals and the remembered tastes of childhood. They are most of all issues connected with bygone times, which can be resurrected thanks to the wealth of memories. Certainly those memories have a self-didactic character, lead towards a better understanding of one's own life, and reveal individual development (Czerniawska, 2002).

Childhood is the period of building relationships, and of creating one's own personality and identity. It turns out that an important role in these processes is played by food and all aspects connected with the fundamental necessity of satiating hunger. Memories which I found constitute an excellent exemplification of how multidimensional those issues are, and much further research can be done in this subject. Many motifs which I have explored are intertwined and complementary, opening further possible paths for inquiry and discoveries. I invite my readers to undertake this search, as their wealth and value seem to be priceless. I am certain that this search can turn out to be a wondrous, inspirational journey, which I have experienced myself and wish it for all of you. As Proust remarks: "Even momentarily resurrected images have an amazing power: they make the room's walls disappear, instead we admire the trees growing by the railroad tracks, or the incoming sea wave: they force the nostrils to inhale the scent of far away places [...], they induce amazement comparable to the wondrous visions experienced just before one falls asleep" (Proust, as cited in Demetrio, 2000, p. 64).

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Monika Sulik

Autour de la table :

À la recherche de la dimension historico-pédagogique des saveurs de l'enfance

Résumé

La découverte — dans les textes à caractère biographique — de nombreuses références aux souvenirs sensoriels de l'enfance, et surtout à ceux liés à la nourriture, à sa saveur et son odeur compris aussi bien au sens propre qu'au métaphorique, est devenue l'inspiration pour mes réflexions. Il s'avère que ces souvenirs sont extrêmement nets. Ils se gravent intensément dans la mémoire, voire, ils constituent la « mémoire du cœur ». La table, en tant que lieu très important et symbolique, occupe dans ces souvenirs une place particulière.

Dans les présentes réflexions, je désire montrer — à l'aide des extraits provenant des biographies des personnes plus ou moins connues et populaires — l'importance des sensations des saveurs de l'enfance dans les souvenirs autobiographiques ; qu'elles soient amères, salées, aigres ou encore sucrées. Les saveurs de l'enfance deviennent pour nous non seulement des sensations sensorielles, des mythes particuliers, mais il arrive souvent qu'elles fassent fonction de machine à explorer le temps et le lieu. J'envisage donc d'essayer de présenter la dimension historico-pédagogique de la saveur et d'inciter les lecteurs aux recherches individuelles sur ce plan.

Monika Sulik

Wokół stołu:

W poszukiwaniu historyczno-pedagogicznego wymiaru smaków z okresu dzieciństwa

Streszczenie

Inspiracją do podjętych refleksji stało się odkrycie w materiałach o charakterze biograficznym licznych nawiązań do zmysłowych wspomnień z okresu dzieciństwa, a szczególnie wspomnień związanych z jedzeniem, jego smakiem i zapachem, rozumianych zarówno w sensie dosłownym, jak i metaforycznym. Wspomnienia te, jak się okazuje, są niezwykle wyraziste, bardzo głęboko zapadają w pamięć, stanowią wręcz „pamięć serca”. Szczególne miejsce w tych wspomnieniach zajmuje stół, jako miejsce niezwykle ważne i symboliczne.

W niniejszych rozważaniach pragnę za pomocą opublikowanych fragmentów biografii osób mniej lub bardziej znanych i popularnych ukazać, jak ważne miejsce we wspomnieniach autobiograficznych odgrywają doznania smakowe z okresu dzieciństwa. Gorzkie, słone, kwaśne czy też słodkie. Smaki z okresu dzieciństwa, stają się dla nas nie tylko doznaniem zmysłowymi, swoistymi mitami, lecz bardzo często pełnią funkcję wehikułu czasu i miejsca. Zamierzam zatem podjąć próbę ukazania historyczno-pedagogicznego wymiaru smaku dzieciństwa oraz skłonić czytelników do osobistych poszukiwań w tym zakresie.